

# Transformational Leadership: *How Do We Get There?*

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## **Introduction**

The word transform, derived from the Latin word *transformare*, means to "change the nature, function, or condition of, to convert." According to Stephen Hacker and Tammy Roberts, the definition of organizational transformation is "the marked change in the nature or function of organizational systems creating discontinuous, step-function improvement in sought-after result areas" (1). At the heart of transformational leadership is the commitment of the leader to make a change or produce transformation in an organization or system.

According to Roueche, Baker, and Rose, transformational leadership in the community college is defined as "the ability of the community college CEO to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others by working with and through them in order to accomplish the college's mission and purpose" (11). Community college leaders must understand that changing an institution must include a process of changing people by influencing their beliefs and behaviors. Leaders must accept that change could produce resistance; therefore, they must allow followers to work through the psychological implications of the change process so that they will be able to explore the personal impact of change in their work environment.

In the book *The Leadership Challenge*, the authors suggest that when transformational leadership exists, people "raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality" (153). Transforming leadership becomes moral when it raises "the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led, and thus has a transforming effect on both" (153).

This transforming effect is carried throughout the institution. Transformational leaders seek opportunities for change in order to grow, innovate, and improve their environment. Transformational leaders take charge of change. These leaders instill "a sense of adventure in others, look for ways to radically alter the status quo, and ... scan the environment for

new and fresh ideas. Leaders always search for opportunities to do what has never been done" (Kouzes and Posner 177).

Throughout this paper and presentation, the characteristics of transformational leadership will be explored and practical suggestions will be offered on how to transform leadership skills. The hallmarks of effective transformational leadership will be examined and validated by transformational leadership research. The top five characteristics of transformational leadership that emerged from the research are as follows:

- \* Creating shared visions and goals
- \* Fostering participation in decision making processes
- \* Providing intellectual stimulation
- \* Building relationships with others (including diverse and multicultural groups)
- \* Demonstrating high performance expectations

By being aware of these characteristics, leaders should increase their job performance and create a more positive working environment that emphasizes participation and strong relationships with others.

### **Creating shared vision and goals**

A primary characteristic of the transformational leader is to have the synergy to create visions and goals for the institution out of the old vision. The leader must not only create a new vision for the institution but also adequately communicate this vision to others. Followers must see the vision and commit themselves to the vision.

Roueche, Bakker, and Rose suggest that transformational leaders attend to three stages in sharing their vision with their followers.

- Stage I: Recognize the need for revitalization and new direction around the mission
- Stage II: Create a new vision
- Stage III: Institutionalize change to accomplish the mission (33)

Throughout these stages, the role of the transformational leader is to create a work environment based on a shared vision. The key to successful transformational leadership is to work toward a shared vision whereby followers are enlisted and the vision is brought to life. In *The Leadership Challenge*, the authors emphasize that "by using powerful

language, positive communication style, and nonverbal expressiveness, leaders breathe life (the literal definition of the word inspire) into a vision” (155).

In this way, leaders are able to develop a "shared sense of destiny ... they have to communicate the purpose and build support for the direction” (Kouzes and Posner 143). Leaders involved in creating a shared vision know that people must have an understanding of the future and also a reason to move toward a new horizon. The members of an organization must understand, accept, and commit to the vision. If this occurs, there is a greater possibility for the organization to change and reach its full potential.

### **Fostering participation in decision making processes**

The transformational leader is comfortable involving others in the decision making process. If the leader empowers others and delegates responsibilities, followers are able to share in the decision making process. They are more likely to use the participatory process to arrive at consensus. According to Pielstick, when leaders foster participation with others in the decision making process, there is less likelihood for escalating conflict to emerge (5).

Transforming leaders also support participation for followers by inviting them to be part of the strategic planning process in an organization. By encouraging others to buy into the vision and mission of the organization, leaders help followers feel ownership for the objective and desired results. This process promotes continuous quality improvement within the organization.

A synergist process is created when power and responsibility are extended to others. As Kouzes and Posner suggest, "as more responsibility is assumed by constituents, leaders can expend more energy in other areas, enhancing their own sphere of influence and bringing additional resources back to their units to be distributed once again among the group members"(298). By involving others in the decision-making process, leaders help establish a climate of trust and self-confidence in the organization.

### **Providing intellectual stimulation**

Another key aspect of transformational leadership is that the leader must intellectually and emotionally stimulate people. When leaders inspire and empower others, the work becomes stimulating, motivating,

challenging, and fascinating (Bennis and Goldsmith 2007). By building on their strengths and enhancing their knowledge and skills, leaders can have a transforming effect upon the lives of their employees by helping them stay engaged and competent in their chosen career.

In a sense, the leader acts as a coach and educator by providing avenues to help followers to learn and develop their skills. By providing professional development, leaders show that an investment in people has vast benefits to the organization. Leaders must investigate ways to provide institutional support for ongoing, experiential learning and maturation for their followers.

In order to strengthen others, leaders must create a learning environment where people feel safe so they feel capable of learning, changing and developing new skills. The research conducted by Kouzes and Posner revealed that "a learning climate, characterized by trust and openness, is a precursor for any successful organizational change efforts. . . As people are listened to, more information becomes available, and they experience greater common ground and reasons to engage in cooperative behavior" (309-310). Providing intellectual stimulation for employees enriches the work environment.

### **Building relationships with others (including diverse and multicultural groups)**

Another important characteristic of an effective leader is community building. Instead of promoting a culture of competition, the leader works toward an environment of community building. Through the community building model, the leader has a mentality that is inclusive to all followers including diverse and multicultural groups. They listen to everyone and seek to create an atmosphere of empowerment in their organization.

Transformational leaders make other people feel strong. According to Kouzes and Posner, these leaders "enable others to take ownership and responsibility for their group's success by enhancing their competence and their confidence in their abilities, by listening to their ideas and acting upon them, by involving them in important decisions, and by acknowledging and giving them credit for their contributions" (281).

By building relationships with others and fostering community building, the transformational leader helps others to develop their skills and improves productivity within the organization. Followers believe that they have the ability to make a difference in their organization which enhances morale.

## **Demonstrating high performance expectations**

Successful leaders expect the best from their employees and from themselves. Leaders should treat people in a positive way in order to boost their self confidence so that they achieve more in the workplace than what they anticipated. In order for people to achieve high performance, leaders must have clear standards in order for them to be at peak performance levels. They must also provide clear directions, feedback, and encouragement.

Sometimes it may be difficult for leaders to establish clearly defined expectations. Leaders must have a comprehensive understanding of employee standards and employee needs in order to motivate the followers to perform their roles effectively. They must see "the big picture" and how each person in the organization fits into that picture (Rouche, Baker, and Rose 199). The leader must articulate the responsibility of each employee for the shared vision as it relates to individual duties and expectations.

By articulating high expectations for their followers, leaders provoke a heightened sense of commitment, sacrifice, motivation, and performance from followers. Followers exhibit a significantly higher sense of job satisfaction. They become more effective and produce better quality results and high performance in the workplace (Pielstick 7).

## **Ten practical suggestions to enhance transformational leadership skills**

The transformational leader can transform the working environment by understanding the challenges confronting transformational leaders and incorporating the following practical considerations:

1. Understands the characteristics of the transformational leader
2. Knows him/herself
3. Creates a vision for the future
4. Communicates with meaning
5. Maintains trust and integrity
6. Realizes intention through actions
7. Expects the best from others
8. Inspires and encourages others
9. Strengthens others
10. Recognizes and rewards contributions

## **Conclusion**

The characteristics of the transformational leader are noteworthy. At the core of transformational leadership is a raised consciousness of self, relationships, and the organization. By producing higher level of consciousness within the individual and the group, leaders are able to produce transformation within the organization.

Transformational leaders are change agents. They exhibit characteristics that reflect a vision for the future, demonstrate an ability to influence others, provide inspiration and encouragement to others, and demonstrate high performance expectations. The end result of transformational leadership is that people are motivated to succeed and the institution is strengthened and transformed. Transformational leadership is a process whereby ordinary people bring forth the best in themselves and others.

## Works Consulted

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